

How do you measure a nation's progress

Sustrans' submission to Welsh Government's consultation into Proposals for National Well-being Indicators to measure the seven well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014

7th January 2016

Introduction

Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

Sustrans strongly supports the objectives of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act and sees the Act as a means of ensuring Wales' long term problems are properly addressed by all public services. We believe the indicators chosen for the purposes of the Act will send a strong message about which issues are of greatest importance to the long term well-being of Wales and it is therefore vital that the correct set of indicators is adopted.

Amendment to the Indicator Set

We understand the desire to restrict the number of indicators to a manageable level, to do otherwise would weaken their capacity to effect change. There is clearly a need to focus on the issues that are most important to the long term well-being of Wales. We have therefore confined our proposal for amendments to requesting one additional indicator, and even that is a disaggregation of an existing group rather than the introduction of a new topic.

Our proposal relates to indicator 3: People making healthy lifestyle choices. We believe the behaviours listed within this group are critical to achieving the Healthy Wales goal by preventative action. However grouping them together will inevitably underplay the importance of each behaviour. This is particularly true of physical activity.

The impact of physical activity is immense and backed by countless scientific studies. If we are to achieve the Well-being of Future Generations Act's Goal of a Healthy Wales by 2050, addressing Wales's poor record in regard to physical activity is fundamental.

Regular physical activity has many benefits to health, including mental health and well-being. People who are physically active have up to a 50% reduced risk of developing the major chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers and a 20-30% reduced risk of

premature death. It has been estimated that the cost of physical inactivity to Wales is around £650 million per year. (Source: Climbing higher: creating an active Wales. Welsh Government, 2009).

We therefore propose that there be an additional indicator of: People meeting the physical activity guidelines; measured by the National Survey for Wales.

The sectors within the public service that can impact on physical activity rates are distinct to the other behaviours measured in the basket. For example, transport and planning can each have a significant impact on physical activity but not on nutrition or smoking. Having a stand-alone indicator that those sectors can clearly have an impact on improving is much more likely to result in public services working to achieve outcomes across a range of goals, which was surely the intention of the Act. Consigning it to a very health focussed basket makes it less likely to be taken into account by the public services outside of the health sector.

The indicators also have an important influence on the new Public Services Boards since the Act requires them to undertake an analysis of the state of well-being in their area. That analysis “must refer to any national indicators”. The analysis will be key in the drawing up of Well-Being Plans. We believe it is vital that physical activity features strongly in the Well-Being Plans, failure to provide a standalone indicator will inevitably make that less likely.

With regard to the impact on the national goals, physical activity clearly impacts on the health goal. By improving the physical and mental health of the working population it will also contribute significantly to the prosperous Wales goal both by reducing sickness absence and increasing productivity. The importance of active travel as a means of increasing physical activity also gives it a role in achieving the Cohesive Communities goal’s requirement for “well connected communities”, given that the Active Travel Act should mean that Welsh communities will be well connected by high quality walking and cycling routes.

The consultation document makes it clear that in addition to the goals the indicators are required to take into account the principles of the Act:

- Integration – Does the indicator help us measure more than 1 well-being goal?

We have demonstrated that physical activity impacts on three of the goals.

- Prevention – Does the indicator tell us whether we are tackling the underlying causes of the problems we face in Wales?

An increase in physical activity will prevent a whole range of diseases that are seriously detrimental to the health of the Welsh population and impose enormous costs on public services.

- Long-term – If this indicator is measured over a long period of time does it tell a clear story of change? Can it help us analyse future trends? If it is only measuring a change we expect to see over the next 3-5 years how can it influence decision making?

Given that currently only 29% of Welsh adults meet the recommended level of physical activity, it is clear that the behaviour change needed to bring this to an acceptable level will take a considerable period of time.

- Collaboration – Can the indicator be used to generate discussion with partners in addressing the underlying issue?

Effectively addressing the low levels of physical activity will require collaboration from a range of public bodies. For example collaboration between transport services and education could make a significant contribution by increasing the number of children who actively travel to school.

- Involvement – Is the indicator measuring the whole population?

Yes.

Conclusion

There is clear evidence of the importance of Physical Activity to the long term Well Being of Wales. It is also clear that highlighting it as a behaviour that needs to be measured would have an impact on a range of decision makers who would have the capacity to effect long term beneficial change. Welsh Government itself has clearly placed a great emphasis on physical activity by establishing the cross government Physical Activity Executive Group and passing the Active Travel Act, we believe this emphasis should be reflected in the indicator set.

Sustrans therefore proposes that an additional indicator of: People meeting the physical activity guidelines be established by disaggregating physical activity from the current indicator 3. We are content that it continue to be measured by the National Survey for Wales.

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